1999

Political Will, Local Union Transformation, and the Organizing Imperative

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Abstract

[Excerpt] As part of its ongoing commitment, SEIU has devoted increasing attention to the challenge of getting local unions to embrace organizing and to allocate sufficient resources to the task. In this context, the unions 1992 national convention adopted two key resolutions: one to affirm the centrality of organizing, the second to assist leadership development with targeted educational programs. In the months following the convention, a discussion unfolded among national staff regarding appropriate steps required to assist local union leaders committed to change. Although internal organizing and initiatives to develop leadership skills among women and people of color were encouraged, the highest priority was afforded to external organizing. The objective was to expedite a dramatic reorientation toward external organizing at the local level. Because SEIU is decentralized-with significant local union autonomy, buy-in from local leaders was viewed as essential to assure organizing on the scale required to maintain steady growth and thereby enhance the unions power.

The discussions among national staff came to be defined as "local union transformation" and ultimately focused on the issue of representation. If local resources are to be freed for external organizing, then it follows that representational functions will be affected. A decision was reached to examine the actual steps that SEIU locals were taking to alter their methods of representation. A staff working group was established to explore this issue. Particular attention was devoted to identifying practices that would fulfill representational obligations and save resources.

In 1994 the international contracted with Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations to help it look more deeply at this question. SEIU chose to do this through a concrete examination of the experiences of several local unions. The staff work team began with something of a buckshot approach, sharing anecdotal information about a range of innovations. Attention was then narrowed to a manageable number of representative locals, covering all U.S. regions and representing all SEIU industries, and with a variety of experiences. Twelve "best-practices" locals were selected for in-depth analysis. The choice of these locals did not reflect a value judgment on locals not chosen, nor was the choice the result of a scientific method. Rather, the work team looked at a variety of different experiences that might help it think through which steps could be taken to shift resources in SEIU locals, with the ultimate objective being greater resources allocated to organizing. This essay focuses on the specific practices of eight of these locals, although it is based on all twelve cases, plus interviews and discussions with representatives from at least ten other national unions.

Keywords

labor movement, unions, organization, labor rights, revitalization

Disciplines

Labor and Employment Law | Labor Relations | Unions

Comments

Suggested Citation

Fletcher. Jr., B. & Hurd, R. W. (1999). Political will, local union transformation, and the organizing imperative [Electronic version]. In. B. Nissen (Ed.), *Which direction for organized labor? Essays on organizing, outreach, and internal transformations* (pp. 191-216). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles/315/

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Political Will, Local Union Transformation, and the Organizing Imperative

Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Richard W. Hurd

Beginning in the mid-1980s under President John Sweeney, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) purposely has struggled with the question of how best to stimulate the renaissance of the U.S. labor movement. Sweeney increased the national staff from about twenty to more than two hundred, selecting progressive unionists from within the SEIU and from other unions. By design, members of the staff were younger and more venturesome than their counterparts at other national union headquarters (Piore 1994, 527). While grappling with the day-to-day challenges of conducting SEIU business, the staff never lost sight of the objective of serving as a catalyst for change. A consensus emerged that rebuilding the labor movement would require massive efforts to organize the unorganized, and that SEIU should lead the way.

Over time the international shifted attention and resources into an aggressive organizing program. Simultaneously, Sweeney and organizing director Andy Stern led what might be described as an ideological offensive to win support for organizing from activists and elected leaders at all levels of the union. The results of this initiative are well-known—a combination of organizing, affiliations, and mergers made SEIU the fastest- growing union in the country, with membership more than doubling during a period when most unions experienced substantial declines. In short, "SEIU has been able to grow significantly because the leadership encourages new ideas and risk taking, supports new programs, and promotes organizing" (Needleman 1993, 361).

As part of its ongoing commitment, SEIU has devoted increasing attention to the challenge of getting local unions to embrace organizing and to allocate sufficient resources to the task. In this context, the union's 1992 national convention adopted two key resolutions: one to affirm the centrality of organizing, the

second to assist leadership development with targeted educational programs (Needleman 1993, 362). In the months following the convention, a discussion unfolded among national staff regarding appropriate steps required to assist local union leaders committed to change. Although internal organizing and initiatives to develop leadership skills among women and people of color were encouraged, the highest priority was afforded to external organizing. The objective was to expedite a dramatic reorientation toward external organizing at the local level. Because SEIU is decentralized with significant local union autonomy, buy-in from local leaders was viewed as essential to assure organizing on the scale required to maintain steady growth and thereby enhance the union's power.

The discussions among national staff came to be defined as "local union transformation" and ultimately focused on the issue of representation. If local resources are to be freed for external organizing, then it follows that representational functions will be affected. A decision was reached to examine the actual steps that SEIU locals were taking to alter their methods of representation. A staff working group was established to explore this issue. Particular attention was devoted to identifying practices that would fulfill representational obligations and save resources.

In 1994 the international contracted with Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations to help it look more deeply at this question. SEIU chose to do this through a concrete examination of the experiences of several local unions. The staff work team began with something of a buckshot approach, sharing anecdotal information about a range of innovations. Attention was then narrowed to a manageable number of representative locals, covering all U.S. regions and representing all SEIU industries, and with a variety of experiences. Twelve "best-practices" locals were selected for in-depth analysis. The choice of these locals did not reflect a value judgment on locals not chosen, nor was the choice the result of a scientific method. Rather, the work team looked at a variety of different experiences that might help it think through which steps could be taken to shift resources in SEIU locals, with the ultimate objective being greater resources allocated to organizing. This essay focuses on the specific practices of eight of these locals, although it is based on all twelve cases, plus interviews and discussions with representatives from at least ten other national unions.[1]

THE REPRESENTATIONAL DILEMMA

The locals cited below have utilized a variety of different approaches vis-à-vis representation. In some cases they have revised practice as a result of a conscious decision that greater resources need to be allocated to organizing

(internal and/or external). In other cases, changes have been introduced in order to foster the type of organizational culture that the leadership is attempting to develop. In still other cases, practices have been adopted as part of an attempt to make procedures more efficient. For purposes of the best-practices project, SEIU decided to examine different aspects of the representational process without any prejudgment regarding the intent of the change or procedure introduced.

One problem that has gripped the U.S. union movement has been how to address effectively and appropriately the issues of individual instances of workplace injustices (alleged and real). Some unions, including locals within SEIU, have made the decision to allocate the bulk of their resources to handling such cases; specifically, they have used staff to handle all levels of the grievance procedure from the first step through arbitration. In other cases, locals have immense legal bills from law firms retained to handle arbitrations. This approach often has been pursued at the expense of other activities of the locals, including organizing. It is this which generally is referred to as the *servicing model of unionism.* Under this model the local chooses to do everything through their staff structure *for* the individual worker rather than encouraging the worker to engage in work site struggles along with other union members. This implies, in essence, a prioritization and a resource choice. "Servicing," as a term, in some respects misdescribes and caricatures some of the day-to-day representational work necessary for a local union to sustain itself. To avoid confusion, we do not deal at length here with "servicing" but rather with how local unions represent their members. Although representation includes bargaining as well as the grievance procedure, this study focuses on the grievance system. The intent has always been to examine bargaining as a subsequent part of this same project.

In an attempt to counter the "servicing" approach, some unions, including many locals within the SEIU ranks, have moved to alter their representational practices and to place greater emphasis on internal organizing. This emphasis on mobilization is often called the *organizing model of unionism.* As part of the research reported here it was found that (1) there is not necessarily a common definition of the "organizing model" and (2) among those locals that have formally adopted this approach, there is not necessarily an allocation of resources to external organizing. In short, the "organizing model" generally is very successful in actually mobilizing the existing members, but it is often staff-intensive (at least in the beginning) and does not automatically translate into external growth.[2]

For this reason, attempts to discover means of streamlining the representational process in order to access greater resources for external organizing is

only one part of the overall equation. The other part appears to be the need for a consciously developed external organizing plan, with the required resources and personnel. Combining the two into an overall strategic plan for the local and subsequently implementing that strategic plan can provide the basis for forward motion. In the absence of such a comprehensive approach, a local may find that it obtains and devotes resources to mobilizing and energizing its current membership (an activity that must continue to take place), but with no new growth. By implication, the "organizing model" alone could result in a scenario where the labor movement would continue its decline although it would decline militantly. If organized labor is to escape oblivion, it must find ways to access resources in order to grow as a percentage of the overall working class.

LOCAL UNION TRANSFORMATION IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There have been significant efforts over the years to address the dilemma caused for labor by the lack of growth. The dramatic crisis reflected in the United States by the absolute decline of membership in the 1980s elevated concern with the problem. Such concern inevitably took political form and ultimately contributed to the successful challenge led by John Sweeney culminating in his election as president of the AFL-CIO. The relevant question, of course, is whether this is too little too late. The jury remains out on that, but it can be said that a serious look is being taken at the way some unions do their work. The local union transformation project advanced by SEIU has been one part of the process.

With the selection of Andy Stern as Sweeney's successor at SEIU and the advent of the Stern administration, transformation work has gone into a higher gear. Stern is placing an emphasis on getting local unions to become organizing locals. This effort involves assuring that locals actually place significant resources into *external* organizing, that they have a real organizing plan (with clear targets), and that they place a person in a position of responsibility to direct the organizing program (an organizing director). Although we do not discuss that effort here, we view it as essential that local union transformation be effectively integrated into any attempt by a national union to elevate the importance of external organizing.

A useful perspective on the problems and possibilities associated with organizational transformation is offered by John Kotter in a *Harvard Business Review* article (Kotter 1995). Although he bases his observations on the experiences of large corporations, we believe that many of the lessons he draws are applicable to unions. SEIU has found that transformation work involves actually convincing locals of its necessity. Along the lines of Kotter's observations,

Stern is impressing upon the locals a sense of real urgency to elevate the importance of organizing and introduce the structural changes this implies. At the same time, introducing such changes necessitates preparing for, discussing, and implementing approaches to representation that are different from current practice in most of organized labor. It is with this in mind that the work of the best-practices project and local union transformation have been so important. While one cannot inoculate an organization against all of the expected repercussions of dramatic change, through examining history one can anticipate the form and content of many eruptions.

The remainder of this essay reports on the actual experiences of SEIU locals included in the best practices project. The information was gathered in visits to each local where on-site interviews were conducted with elected leaders, staff, and activist members. The interviews were supplemented with internal documents provided by the locals and data on membership trends compiled by the international. First we will review practices designed to reduce the grievance and arbitration burden that confronts every local we visited. Then we will describe efforts by several locals to mobilize their members as part of a search for alternative ways to conduct representational work. Next comes what we view as the most essential ingredient to successful transformation: cultivating support for change among union members. The essay will conclude with our reflections on the lessons offered by the best-practices project.

ESCAPING THE GRIEVANCE AND ARBITRATION QUAGMIRE

The grievance and arbitration process creates a dilemma for local unions. On the one hand, an independent grievance system defines the union role of protecting against arbitrary management. On the other hand, most grievances address problems of individual workers and draw the union's attention away from collective concerns. More to the point for local unions committed to transformation, grievances and arbitrations can swallow up resources and staff time needed for other pursuits, particularly external organizing. The locals in the best practices project have experimented with a variety of approaches designed to streamline grievance handling. Although there is no easy escape from the grievance quagmire, this section reviews some of the more promising methods.

Centralization

One option is to centralize control of the process. The basic idea is to move away from the typical practice where each representative is assigned spe-

cific units and has independent responsibility for all grievances and arbitrations. A centralized system has the potential to introduce efficiencies, for example, by balancing the grievance load or by avoiding duplication of effort in grievance preparation. Some locals have introduced computerized systems that they use to track grievances, to determine trends, and to prepare for arbitrations. The two best-practices locals with computerized systems have not yet experienced any dramatic change in how they perform representational work, although one of them is using the information to target areas for internal organizing. While computerized grievance handling is being refined, a different approach to centralization has immediate potential.

District 925–Seattle, which represents clerical and technical workers at the University of Washington, introduced a new system in 1991. When a member with a problem calls the office, he/she is greeted by an answering machine, "We are in the field organizing, call your steward or leave a message." Office manager Cindy Cole screens all messages and returns calls from members to gather information or answer questions. If a member reports a possible grievance, Cole meets with the representative responsible for that worker's department and a steward is selected to handle the case. Next Cole contacts the member with the steward's name and phone number, and the representative talks with the steward. The steward sends a pregrievance letter that explains the member's responsibility to gather information that will help in evaluating the complaint.

Once the member has forwarded background information, including his/her personnel file, a description of the relevant event(s), and names of witnesses, the steward reviews the case with the representative. Together they make a "realistic assessment" to determine whether a contract violation has occurred; then the steward works with the member if filing a grievance is appropriate. The primary role of the representative is to answer stewards' questions and to monitor time lines. The steward assures that the member receives the pregrievance letter and takes responsibility for handling of the grievance. The member does the preparation work and coordinates with the steward. The pregrievance letter serves two purposes: it informs the member of his/her rights and obligations, and it protects the local from duty of fair representation complaints.

District 925–Seattle has used this system for five years. Its implementation was facilitated by Cole's experience; she had been with the local as a clerical employee since 1984 and over time had gradually taken responsibility for answering members' questions about the contract. In spite of her competence, members were initially "flabbergasted" when the local "turned on the answering machine." Eventually, however, they have adapted and complaints have all

but disappeared. Steward Susan Williams summarizes her peers' attitude toward the shared responsibility in the grievance-handling system, "I believe in empowering people—if they don't want to do the work, I can't help them." Pat Harrison reports that in his unit, "People don't even think of calling the office—they go straight to the steward."

Although representatives monitor timelines and get regular updates from stewards, they are relieved of a considerable burden because all direct communication with the member is handled by Cole and the steward. According to staff director Kim Cook, "The constant pressure to talk with members about their complaints is a problem for a lot of locals; we just do not do it." The advantage of this system, as summarized by organizer-representative Joan Weiss, is that "it allows us to spend more time in the field developing leaders, educating members and organizing." Although staff still handle most appeals, the end result is that the grievance load has declined noticeably and the local focuses on helping people with real grievances. As District 925 president Debbie Schneider sums up the underlying philosophy, "The job of the union is to build greater power in the workplace, not to protect whiners."

Screening

A second option for improving efficiency is to establish a formal grievance screening process. An effective screen can assure that time and resources are not wasted on frivolous grievances, or on grievances that offer little hope of a positive result based on precedents established in prior cases. By formalizing the screening process, some locals have introduced a degree of impartiality into the decision, which reduces complaints from members whose potential grievance or arbitration has not been pursued. One best-practices local introduced a screening process primarily to reduce a major grievance and arbitration backlog. The backlog was cut by 80 percent, and staff time and resources were reallocated to internal and external organizing. However, a logjam need not be the motivating force, as the following case demonstrates.

Local 617 in Newark represents public school, day care, and housing authority employees. The local's long-standing grievance committee must approve every formal grievance before it is filed. The committee includes one elected member from each of the local's five major units plus the chief steward; it meets every Tuesday night. A member with a problem first will be assisted by a shop steward or business agent (BA) who will attempt to resolve the situation informally. If the member is at fault, the union attempts to counsel him/her to take responsibility or, if necessary, refers the member to an appropriate social service agency. If there is a possible breach of the contract or dis-

ciplinary procedures, and if informal resolution is not possible, the member must stop by the union office after work and complete a complaint form (an experienced staff member is always available to lend assistance). The complaint form is referred to the appropriate BA, who investigates the case. The member and the BA then attend a grievance committee meeting together. As BA Raqman Muhamad describes the process, "The grievance committee grills them and lets them know whether the grievance is legitimate." This process not only helps the local screen grievances, it also gets the members to take responsibility. And as executive vice president John (J. J.) Johnson emphasizes, "If you can get members to the union office, you get more participation in the local."

Staff Specialization

A third option for freeing resources from the grievance and arbitration quagmire is staff specialization. The typical local expects staff representatives to perform a broad range of functions, including internal organizing and mobilization, support for the external organizing program, political action, attendance at labor-management meetings, and contract negotiations. The reality is that an inordinate amount of time and energy is devoted to individual members' complaints, problems, and grievances. While many other duties are loosely defined with flexible deadlines, grievances are very specific tasks with clear timelines. Furthermore, results are easily monitored—the number of grievances settled, the number of arbitrations won, and the number of phone calls to the union office from disgruntled members. There is a natural tendency for staff to focus on grievances and put other work aside.

Several locals have concluded that the only way to assure appropriate staff attention to other functions, particularly those related to organizing, is to assign all grievance and arbitration work to a limited number of representatives. The other members of the staff are thereby freed to focus on external organizing, internal organizing, or other priority activities. According to one local leader, "The idea . . . is to reduce the number of people spending time on the grievance mill and the bosses' agenda and put a majority of field staff on our agenda." In some locals staff lawyers or experienced representatives handle all arbitrations. In other cases specialization has been facilitated by hiring members as part-timers to assist with grievances. A couple of these locals have experienced adjustment pains, as staff have to "scramble to keep up with grievances" and resort to "damage control." The lesson is that because of potentially troublesome side effects, it is important to establish a clear link between specialization and the new initiatives it facilitates.

Local 509, which represents Massachusetts Social Service workers, has attempted for several years to increase staff attention to internal organizing and mobilization. However, a heavy load of grievances and arbitrations has prevented individual staff members from sustaining consistent action. As representative Judy Davis describes the situation, "I really couldn't do [internal] organizing because there was always a crisis; I would have an office ready to go, then be pulled away [to deal with a grievance or arbitration] and things would fall apart." After extensive discussions among the staff, in 1995 the local decided to introduce specialization. Two positions were created—field representative/litigator and field representative/organizer—each with its own job description. The litigator specializes in grievances, appeals, and arbitrations and is responsible for the attendant preparatory work as well as coordinating with the employee(s) involved. The organizer concentrates on recruitment, leadership development, membership participation, and work site actions.

The local's full-time field representatives self-selected in equal numbers for the two specialties, working in pairs with one litigator and one organizer serving the same constituency. Each pair works out its own division of labor, but the standard is for the litigator to handle discipline and discharge cases plus clear individual grievances, while the organizer takes care of group grievances and anything that can be resolved through internal organizing.

During an initial adjustment period complaints from members increased because they didn't understand the change, and litigators were swamped while they figured out how to prioritize and reorganize their own time allocation. Now, however, the consensus is that the new system is working well. Litigator Darrel Cole explains, "The change has allowed me to focus on the part of the job I like the best. . . . Trying to do both was tough; this is a better way." Organizer Judy Davis reports, "I'm actively dealing with twelve offices. The members I'm seeing are really pleased, and I'm excited about it." The new system is working best where chapter officers are taking on more work. Most of them have accepted increased responsibility with enthusiasm. As chapter president Marilyn Souza sees it, "The local is emphasizing internal organizing because we need it. Without internal organizing we are just a union in name."

Delegation

A fourth option for more efficient delivery of grievance and arbitration services is delegation. The idea is to free staff time from the daily grind of grievances by assigning responsibility to stewards. Although in most instances the staff representative continues to monitor all grievances, stewards take over much of the work, especially during the early stages of the process. Delegation

is effective only if stewards have the commitment and skills to do the job. This requires an aggressive outreach effort to recruit activists who are motivated and have leadership potential, plus an education and training program to prepare stewards for the task at hand. Although delegation encounters resistance from stewards reluctant to accept increased responsibility and from staff who have a hard time letting go of grievances, most locals that have tried it have benefited substantially.

Local 1199WV represents twelve thousand health care and social service workers in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. The local has long had a commitment to organizing, but many of the staff representatives were bogged down in grievances. In 1994 a decision was reached to take advantage of a strong delegate system (delegates are elected leaders who function as stewards) by introducing a new committee structure in each chapter. Under the new structure, each of the local's 140 chapters has a grievance chair (the equivalent of a chief steward) plus five standing committees: organizing, political action, labor solidarity, civil rights, and health and safety. The priority in implementing the new structure was to recruit a grievance chair, selecting from those already capable of handling grievances at the second step. This criteria is crucial because grievance chairs are responsible for all third step hearings.

In support of the increased expectations placed on delegates, Local 1199WV created a new position for training director. A former organizer for the local coordinates two-day trainings for each of the six areas of responsibility. The grievance chair training focuses exclusively on step-three grievances and is open to two delegates from each chapter. Although grievance chair and organizing chair training have been given priority, the local has also offered sessions on political action, health and safety, labor solidarity, and civil rights. The new structure frees staff organizers to concentrate on leadership development and organizing, while retaining responsibility for arbitrations and contract negotiations. Eighteen months after the new structure was introduced the grievance chairs were handling all step-three grievances in about 80 percent of the chapters, and organizing committees were active (that is, actually doing organizing) in about half of the chapters.

Rank-and-file leaders and staff are enthusiastic about the impact. Delegate Larry Daniels explains, "Now with the committee structure we do it ourselves. . . . The boss has to deal with people in the chapter so the power is here rather than an outside force." Ohio team leader Dave Regan reports, "Becky and Jennifer [staff organizers] haven't been to a grievance meeting in six months, which means that we are functioning at a higher level." This is echoed by Teresa Ball: "This is the most exciting thing we've done in the thirteen years I've been here; it frees us to do organizing which is fun work."

INTERNAL ORGANIZING AND MOBILIZATION

Most of the best-practices locals have endeavored to involve members more actively in the life of the union. Some locals have made this effort a focal point of their transformation work. The idea that revitalization of the labor movement can be achieved best by mobilizing current members has often been associated with the "organizing model" of unionism. In this section we make no effort to evaluate the validity of the "organizing model" per se, but rather present four examples of locals that have benefited from effective programs of internal organizing and mobilization. (Those interested in the "organizing model" debate should read Fletcher and Hurd 1998.)

Local 73 in Chicago has a long history as an organizing local. However, over time the local became more and more staff-driven. As President Tom Balanoff describes the situation, "The members didn't believe in the union . . . [so] we decided to concentrate on union building, communication and struggle." The effort to recapture member commitment has been rooted in contract campaigns. For each negotiation the local establishes a contract action team and uses tactics such as sticker days, group grievances, phone line jamming, and public rallies. These campaigns have helped build rank-and-file leadership, and creative actions taken by a militant minority have helped rekindle enthusiasm. By tying contract negotiations to activism and putting people in the streets, Local 73 is making significant strides. According to service representative Al Pieper, "People are progressing and starting to see things from a different paradigm; . . . they are gaining knowledge by going through struggle."

Local 200A in Syracuse also has concentrated on contract campaigns as an opportunity to mobilize members. The leaders and staff of the local have explicitly rejected the insurance agent approach to unionism, and, as President Marshall Blake explains, they are determined to "engage members in maximum struggle, to move to the highest level of collective struggle." Faced with the reality of many units (most of them small) and multiple negotiations each year, making contract campaigns the focal point of mobilization efforts was a logical choice. Members' interest is heightened at contract time at any rate, and they have responded with high-energy volunteering to distribute contract surveys one-on-one, participating in work site actions and union button campaigns, ratcheting up grievance filings and Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) complaints, and thereby letting the boss know that the workers are the union. Although activism inevitably wanes when the contract is settled, the members are changed by the process. Kathy Tucker, unit chair at Carthage Hospital, describes the effect: "We are no longer timid; we're not always active, but we're always ready." Staff representative Coert Bonthius explains that this

process works even though it requires more time and effort than traditional servicing: "Efficiency is inconsistent with this approach, but people feel connected and we have a stronger union."

Local 503 (Oregon Public Employees Union) represents twenty-two thousand state and local government employees. With fewer contracts to negotiate than some of the locals in other sectors, the OPEU has been able to devote ongoing attention to internal organizing. This commitment moved to a new level as the local prepared for the 1995 negotiations and a potential strike. The centerpiece of the initiative was a comprehensive internal organizing campaign under the theme "Strike Back '95." The organizing began more than a year before the OPEU's contract with the state expired. Staff member Suzanne Wall describes the process as "a good example of adopting a model of external organizing and bringing it into internal organizing." Field staff titles were changed to internal organizers, and they were required to canvass every workplace and track the commitment and activism of every member. When the process started, the local conducted a poll and found that less than half of the members would support a strike. When a vote was held as contract expiration approached after more than a year of internal organizing, 93 percent voted to strike. Then, when the OPEU staged the first statewide public strike in Oregon history in May 1995, more workers went on strike than were members of the union. Executive director Alice Dale concludes that "the strike built this union; we took a quantum leap forward."

The OPEU internal organizing program was initially resisted by staff, not because they were being asked to mobilize the members and build support for a strike but because they were required to chart every workplace and implement a detailed tracking system. However, as team leader Bill Uehlein reports, "Because of the tracking and canvassing we know which people have done what. . . . This got people to look at their jurisdiction more carefully, to look at holes and find people to fill them. . . . The strike helped staff understand why the thorough quantifiable monitoring."

Work site organizers worked closely with internal organizers in the canvassing process. Stewards took on more responsibility over time, and starting in January 1995 handled all step-3 grievances. The OPEU differs from some other locals because staff time freed from grievances as a result of this delegation is *not* diverted from established units. Rather, internal organizers focus on mobilizing members around workplace issues, political action, and external organizing campaigns. As executive director Alice Dale asserts, "We are militant, politically active and very field oriented. . . . We involve local people; we reward staff for building membership and leadership development; and activists who want training get it."

Local 1985, the Georgia State Employees Union (GSEU) functions without the benefit of a collective bargaining law, so its representational work has to be innovative. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the representational effort is essential since there is no union security. With no right to negotiate a contract, the local has promoted its members' interests with an innovative program of workplace actions, demonstrations, and an aggressive political operation. The driving principle for the GSEU as summarized by executive director Tyrone Freeman is "People come first, everything goes back to the members." Much like the locals just described that mobilize members during contract campaigns, GSEU relies on creative tactics as its primary representational set of tools—petitions, arm bands, pins, marches, and rallies. The local also files grievances through the state's merit system, but even here the preferred course of action is not traditional; with the assistance of an organizer, a member with an issue is encouraged to find six others affected by it and then file a group grievance. Another focal point of GSEU's representational effort is its extensive grassroots political program; the local sponsors legislative forums around the state, conducts voter registration drives, and holds regular lobby days bringing members to Atlanta to testify on key legislation. The entire political program is designed to "take it back to the members." Political director Andy Freeman describes the symbiotic relationship: "Moving legislators towards our agenda helps recruit members, and because we don't provide traditional services we need numbers to accomplish things politically."

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR TRANSFORMATION

Member buy-in is essential for sustainable transformation. Restructuring grievance and arbitration work can save resources, and alternative approaches to representation can build power. But without member enthusiasm, these innovations are likely to slip away and be replaced by a traditional insurance agent relationship. The servicing magnet is extremely powerful, especially in locals whose members have not been asked to assume responsibility. Best-practices locals have taken a variety of steps to build political will, and a few of them have proven to be extraordinarily effective.

Asserting a Vision

Transformation requires total commitment from the top of the local. If the local's leader equivocates, staff and members also will be cautious, which will undermine potential for positive change. In most of the best-practices locals the leaders have elucidated and supported a vision of the union's potential. The

vision itself has to make sense to the members based on the objective conditions they face, and the way the vision is communicated will naturally fit the style of the leader. A few examples will demonstrate a range of possibilities.

Tyrone Freeman, executive director of Local 1985 (GSEU), took his current position in 1995 after serving as organizing director for two years. Local 1985 has focused on organizing throughout its eleven-year existence, and Freeman has retained that concentration. He has secured enthusiasm and generated activism by connecting the organizing mission to empowerment of the members. According to the current organizing director Katie Foster, "Ty has made the member the most important aspect of what we do." Freeman personally attends leadership meetings every other month at each chapter and listens to concerns, ideas, and feedback. Executive board member Margaret Moss describes the effect of Freeman's presence in the field: "The union should be honest with members so they can trust what you say; people trust Tyrone because when you talk, he listens." First vice president Tom Coleman enthusiastically concurs: "Now that Tyrone is out there, we don't mind challenging [management]; you see the executive director doing things right, it energizes everyone." Freeman himself describes why he spends time with the members: "It's all related to educating them why the whole local is centered around organizing."

Tom Woodruff, president of Local 1199WV,[3] has secured support for an aggressive organizing program with a single and consistent message: "This is a fight over the distribution of wealth. The only way we can change our members' lives is to help workers get a fair share of what they produce." The connection to organizing is reinforced at every staff meeting and every executive board meeting by sharing victories. A few notes from the opening discussion at the local's July 1995 executive board meeting should demonstrate the effect:

> Tom Woodruff: "Victories!"
>
> Executive board member: "I don't know what you've been doing, but we really kicked butt . . . " [greeted by hoots, hollers and cheers]
>
> Tom Woodruff: "Victories!"
>
> Executive board member: "We won 40 to 36. Management said the union walked in like we owned the place. Well DUHHH! We do own the place . . . "
>
> Tom Woodruff: "Victories!"
>
> Executive board member: "We adopted Greenbrier Manor nursing home [as an organizing target]. We walked in and the administrator ran into her office and locked the door. We were in there for 45 minutes talking with people . . . "

By starting all meetings with an opportunity to share victories, Woodruff reinforces the message that permeates all of the local's work: organizing has the

potential to change society. This vision of a union leading the fight for economic justice and winning has really caught on with members. Jennifer Schmidt, who recently left her job as a dietary worker in a mentally retarded and developmentally disabled (MRDD) facility represented by 1199WV to take a job on the local's staff, captures the effect: "We deal with the distribution of wealth. You have to have conversations with people about power and numbers. . . . Victories are shared . . . members have said that they want to be different. They take pride that our union is out front."

In her eleven years as executive director of Local 503 (OPEU), Alice Dale has led the union by the force of her own drive to dramatically higher levels of militance and member involvement. She believes that it is essential to "put members in an uncomfortable position" by requiring them to confront the boss rather than relying on union staff. As described by Bill Uehlein, team leader in the union's Portland office, the OPEU continually asks, "How do we move people in a united way to operate at higher and higher levels of militancy?" Dale's vision is not limited to confrontation and struggle though; she also advocates grassroots control because "the members are the union." Dale's intensity has energized the membership. Internal organizer Guy Schneider describes an "exciting democratic process that is absolutely member-driven." He concludes, "We've moved a long way because of struggle; there's a feeling out there that you've got a union." In May 1995, 90 percent of Oregon's seventeen thousand state employees participated in the OPEU's first statewide strike, fulfilling Alice Dale's ideal as recalled by Tim Pfau (a longtime rank-and-file leader who recently joined the staff as an internal organizer): "Where has the mob gone? I must catch up with them, I am their leader."

Tom Balanoff was elected president of Local 73 in 1994. He sets an example by being out front in the local's bargaining, organizing, and political initiatives. Balanoff wants the local "to push heavy in terms of solidarity, to develop a reputation for being there," and he actively promotes "real trade union values—solidarity of class and collective action." He has relied on his own charisma to drive the process. When Hospital Corporation of American ceased dues deductions at Michael Reese Medical Center during contract negotiations in 1995, Balanoff led a group of seventy activists into the hospital to collect dues. Balanoff went straight to the clerical offices adjacent to the hospital administration, climbed on top of a desk (which elevated his six-and-a-half-foot frame to near ten feet), and announced "I'm your union president!" When asked by the management to leave, he refused: "I'm talking with my members." By the time Balanoff and his Local 73 team left the hospital nearly an hour later almost everyone was wearing a union button. The action helped turn the tide, and the contract was resolved. Balanoff has relied on this type of leadership to

win the enthusiastic backing of members and a diverse staff, most of whom worked for the union before his election. Al Washington puts it simply, "Tom gets involved." Eli Medina observes, "Any program Tom has implemented has worked." Gloria Richard shares the excitement, "We're a great union; we make it happen."

The techniques used by these four remarkable leaders are instructive. But leadership transcends technique or personal style. What is crucial is that each of them has demonstrated commitment to a vision that has inspired members and staff and has won their support for transformation. None of the four pretend to be changing the locals on their own; they are all committed to developing members as leaders. The reality, though, is that leadership with a clear vision and diligence is essential to successful transformation.

ENGAGING MEMBERS AND STAFF

The experiences of the best-practices locals demonstrate that transformation is enhanced when members and staff are given encouragement, opportunities, and challenges that stimulate political growth. Some locals affirm the importance of engaging in struggle, others endorse radicalizing members or raising the level of class consciousness within the local. Most openly reject the insurance agency style of unionism and explicitly promote a vision of a labor movement founded on collective values and committed to economic and social justice. Best-practices locals have used various approaches to raise consciousness. Some brief snapshots will reflect the broad range of options.

Some locals have implemented communications programs to promote change. Local 73 has hired a communications specialist to conduct educational work and consciousness raising through the local's newspaper and site-specific newsletters and leaflets. The newspaper highlights militant actions and broad coalitions but is effectively limited to one directional communication. The quarterly site-specific newsletters and targeted leaflets go further, stimulating discussion and debate among members and work site leaders about the role of the union. Local 509 faced internal opposition to a proposed campaign to organize workers in private sector social service agencies, who were viewed suspiciously by members employed by the state of Massachusetts. The local was able to defuse this narrow self-interest through an informal communications effort, which politically educated elected rank-and-file leaders by engaging them in a series of discussions over an eighteen-month period and eventually won support for the organizing campaign.

Other locals have developed educational programs for the purpose of elevating political awareness. Local 503 (OPEU) trains members in media com-

munications techniques and encourages them to take an assertive role around the state. As a result members have been speaking out on political issues important to the union on radio talk shows, in letters to the editor, and through news interviews. Local 1199WV has established the position of labor solidarity chair in each of its units and offers the chairs training on how to enlighten members about the importance of solidarity and how to involve them in activities that support the broader labor movement. Local 1985 (GSEU) uses a "train the trainer" approach with staff, who then deliver training at chapter meetings around the state on topics such as organizing and grassroots political action.

Some locals believe that actual engagement in struggle is the best way for members and staff to understand the importance of building an aggressive labor movement. Locals such as 200A engage members in contract campaigns not just to improve bargaining outcomes but to increase militancy and help members appreciate the value of collective struggle. Other locals endeavor to involve members in militant action around organizing. This approach is a hallmark of the Justice for Janitors campaigns in two of the best-practices locals. One local recruits volunteers from organized units for its "brigade," which engages in civil disobedience and other actions in support of the local's organizing program. Part of the objective is to get members to take the activism back into their workplaces. The other local turns out members for demonstrations in support of external campaigns in part so that they will "see it working, feel the power, and understand the need for organizing."

Coalition building that actively involves members and staff also has been an important part of the transformation process in many locals. Chicago's Jobs with Justice coalition has been revitalized by Local 73, whose members participated along with three thousand other unionists in a jobs march, established solidarity committees to support locked-out Staley workers, and helped kick off a living wage campaign in Illinois. Marshall Blake of Local 200A was recently elected president of the Syracuse Central Labor Council based on a platform of increased activism. Subsequently, busloads of 200A members joined with others in the labor community to protest the Republican right's "Contract with America" when Newt Gingrich came to Syracuse to deliver a speech.

Although a variety of approaches have been used by best-practices locals in an effort to achieve political commitment to transformation, there is a consistent theme. A progressive ideology is necessary for any local that hopes to win and maintain support from members and staff, especially where transformation involves long-term commitment to an aggressive organizing program. The initiatives described in this section have heightened political awareness among those members who have participated personally or who have been

touched directly. A few quotes from staff members and rank-and-file activists from best-practices locals reflect the potential:

> "The more we link with community, with where members live, the more we can get members active and the more power we gain."
>
> "One thing I feel about OPEU, we're doing the right thing by pushing the envelope of social and economic justice."
>
> "Coming up against the real estate interests people have a sense of their strength, of what they can do. Nobody else is doing that, teaching that the way we are."
>
> "You get knowledge going through struggle. I've learned so much about politics, government, being active."
>
> "We're much bigger players than we were nine years ago—we're organized, have a militant reputation, the members are more active."

In spite of the progress, for many locals questions remain concerning how to reach a critical mass of members and how to make political commitment self-perpetuating. The next section turns to three locals that are attempting to address these questions with comprehensive programs.

Cultivating the Will to Organize

Local union transformation is difficult to sustain in the face of strong internal opposition, and the process makes no sense if, once recast, the local stagnates or reverts to old practices. To endure, transformation must be supported enthusiastically by rank-and-file activists, staff, and members. Several best-practices locals that have been able to maintain momentum have paved the way by developing a culture of organizing.

Local 1985 (GSEU) directs all of its energies in support of organizing. All field staff are referred to as organizers, and they are constantly reminded that their job is to organize. According to Tyrone Freeman, "servicing is not a concept we allow." Organizer Michelle Castleberry confirms the maxim: "Business agent is bad language around here. You just don't grow with a business agent's attitude." The abstention from servicing is facilitated by delegating responsibility to members and hiring part-time grievance technicians and, more important, is understood in the context of empowering members. This connection is endorsed by the elected executive board, as explained by Vice President Tom Coleman: "The executive board assures that dues money is being used in a responsible manner for organizing and building power. . . . The organizer's job is to organize. Chapters are run by the members."

A central component of the local's effort to establish political will is an organizing program run by the members. Member-to-member organizing is coordinated by the statewide organizing committee, whose thirty-five members include the eight-person executive board plus twenty-seven rank-and-file recruiters. As described by Mona Washington, their job is "phone banking, recruiting, leafleting, marching, and talking union all the time." By centering the whole local on organizing, Local 1985 has achieved phenomenal growth from 3,800 dues-paying members in 1993 to nearly 7,000 in 1996, all of it one new member at a time. Political director Andy Freeman describes the union's direction in three words: "Organize, organize, organize."

District 925–Seattle also operates in the public sector and for many years was an open shop. During the 1980s the local pursued a super servicing approach but was unable to attract and retain members, and by 1990 only about 28 percent of bargaining unit employees were paying dues. In 1991 a decision was reached to shift directions and become an organizing local. The decision was communicated openly to members. All committees were disbanded and replaced by a thirty-member organizing council. Every meeting of the council and the local included training on some aspect of organizing, and every decision was considered based on its contribution to building the union. It was during this changeover that the local turned on the answering machine at the union office.

For more than five years 925–Seattle has been in a campaign mode, continually assessing all members and targeting nonmembers, contacting each new employee three times, and working out weekly organizing plans and numerical goals for each staff member. The systematic organizing diligence has paid off: membership hit 40 percent in 1992, the local won a super majority fair share vote in 1994, and current membership stands at over 70 percent with nonmembers paying an agency fee. While continuing the systematic assessment and recruiting in the established bargaining unit, in 1995 the local initiated a campaign to organize nonrepresented clerical, research, and technical workers also employed by the University of Washington; by 1996 the campaign had produced representation election victories in several small units.

Although District 925–Seattle's diligence and systematic commitment to perpetual organizing is impressive in its own right, it could not have survived without support from the membership. By openly discussing the decision to abandon the super servicing approach the local laid the groundwork to build a different culture. There was vocal opposition to the change from some staff, some elected leaders, and some members. But they were publicly confronted by rank-and-file leaders committed to organizing and were eventually silenced. Office manager Cindy Cole recalls, "We worked hard to educate members what

it means to be an organizing local, because we had to make the change to survive." Staff organizer Joan Weiss relates her own conversion: "I was a steward in the old model and did a lot of servicing. I was kind of old school, chasing ambulances. The discussions in 1991 on the change from servicing to organizing convinced me that in reality it's not helping people that builds the union." Steward Joanne Factor sums up the local's creed, "Strength doesn't come from individual grievances but from getting better contracts. That's why we're an organizing union."

The priority of Local 1199WV has never been in doubt. Teresa Ball has worked for 1199WV for thirteen years and reports, "We've always been an organizing local. It's organize or die." Maintaining and strengthening this commitment has required continual attention. As President Tom Woodruff reports, "We have concentrated on how to build the political will to institutionalize a methodical, disciplined organizing program so we don't have to keep re-creating it." Experience has convinced Woodruff that "members will spend more money to build a powerful organization and get ahead." Or as former organizer and current training director Al Bacon emphasizes, "Organizing is about protecting the members we have; you have to organize for power." The attention to building political will and the consistency of the organizing message have paid off in member support for a steadily expanding organizing budget. In 1989 the local made a specific commitment to spend 25 percent of revenue on organizing; in 1990 members voted to increase dues and to support 35 percent for organizing; in 1994 members voted for another dues increase and the executive board earmarked 50 percent for organizing. These decisions have been embraced by the members because they have been reached democratically. The dues increase votes both passed with 65.7 percent support.

The democracy extends to the 140-member executive board, which has better than one representative for each 100 members. Executive board member Larry Daniels captures the rank-and-file spirit with this personal affirmation: "I love my union—it enables me to get my fair share, it's democratic, it enables me to express my own ideas and beliefs." This kind of spirit is enhanced by a no-holds-barred style that excites the members. Ohio area director Dave Regan proclaims, "Let it rip and we'll win more than we lose." Organizer Rachel Brickman agrees, "The most exciting thing about being here is that time after time we risk everything; we're constantly putting it on the line." This aggressiveness changes people, as attested to by Jennifer Schmidt who moved from the rank-and-file onto the staff, "It's great to see people grow, especially women who stand up and take on the world."

For the past five years Local 1199WV has helped send this spirit back into the shop with its organizing internship program. Six interns at a time take five-

week leaves to work on campaigns, where they are exposed to all aspects of organizing. The experience has been that when the interns go back to their chapters they bring enthusiasm with them and usually become the chapter's organizing chair. At the local's July 1995 executive board meeting recent interns were awarded newly designed red T-shirts with a union logo on the front and a graphic on the back: a foot with the toe angled up and flames coming out from the heel proclaiming "Kicking Ass for the Working Class!" A soft-spoken woman who had been reticent a few minutes earlier when reporting an organizing victory seemed to grow a foot as she walked back with her T-shirt and announced in a powerful voice "I'm wearing this to work on Monday!"

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Local union transformation is essential at this critical juncture in the evolution of the U.S. labor movement. Revitalization of the entire movement can succeed only if there is a dramatic shift in orientation at the local level. In this context, it is essential that national union leaders and the AFL-CIO assist and encourage local leaders in part by helping to clarify the qualities and characteristics of transformed locals and by offering a vision of what they are capable of accomplishing.

We have concentrated on three interrelated aspects of local union transformation—streamlining and redefining representational work, mobilizing members, and winning support for durable change. The practices we have described are not intended as panaceas but as examples of the type of experimentation that is necessary as we search for new methods that facilitate growth rather than block it. The following observations embrace the SEIU tenet that external organizing must be the top priority and consider all best practices in light of their potential contribution to this objective.

New Approaches to Representation

The most promising practices aimed at breaking out of the grievance and arbitration morass have a common ingredient: responsibility is pushed down to lower levels. Members are expected to take more responsibility for their actions (no more whining!), and where injustices have occurred they have an obligation to assist with the preparation of their cases. Stewards and other rank-and-file leaders (unit chairs, chapter officers, chief stewards) need to perform their tasks independently without dumping everything on staff representatives. For their part staff must let go, get out of the way, and let members and stewards take over.

Of course, revising practice is not easy, and a few cautions are in order. Centralization should be implemented not as a control process but as a way to systematize grievances so that members and stewards know exactly what is expected of them. Screening can help weed out weak and inappropriate grievances but only if the process is understood by the membership and viewed as impartial. Specialization should not be introduced merely as an expedient to free resources for external organizing or other functions; members need to see some direct evidence that the change can benefit them—for example, increased staff activity in the field doing mobilization work. And most important, delegating responsibility will succeed only if supported by education, on-the-job training, and mentoring.

Two of Kotter's warnings about the failure of transformation efforts are relevant here: obstacles to change must be removed, and during transition periods short-term wins are vital (Kotter 1995, 64–5). Every local we visited encountered resistance to change, from staff wedded to their roles as grievance and arbitration experts and from members comfortable with their passivity. There seems to be no good alternative other than getting the elephants out of the way, and to do this, support for transformation from activist members is essential. There is no more effective way to silence opposition than to win something now and herald it—a successful action or strike, an organizing victory that makes sense to members (for example, a previously nonunion competitor in close proximity), even a third-step grievance win by a steward.

Although the SEIU best-practices project offers a useful glimpse at how some locals have altered how they handle grievances and arbitrations, we want to emphasize that there are no easy answers. What is needed is a willingness to break away from stale methods and to take risks with new approaches to representational work. Other aspects of representation also need to be examined, such as labor-management meetings and especially contract negotiations. In local unions with multiple contracts, bargaining accounts for a significant share of the work of many union staff. This is especially true where there are no industrywide or areawide agreements. Those locals will need to examine how to bargain in a way that supports organizing and look for innovations that contribute to the accumulation of power for workers on a much larger scale than is now common.

The Limits of the "Organizing Model"

In grappling with the challenges of reforming representational practices, all of the SEIU best-practices locals have come face-to-face with the reality of limited member involvement in the union. If locals hope to shift resources into

external organizing, they must reduce resources devoted to other pursuits. As we have just argued, the most promising new approaches to grievance handling involve delegation of responsibility. The need to engage members and mobilize them to contribute more energy to their union is obvious. The experiences of those locals that have made mobilization and internal organizing their priority are instructive and yet sobering.

In order to move beyond the committed core of activists, several locals (as described above) have devoted considerable effort to tapping the energies of a broader cross section of members. The efforts have typically involved borrowing techniques from external organizing and applying them internally, thus the common use of "organizing model" to describe this initiative. These "organizing model" locals have succeeded in raising the level of participation and activism, and as a result have enhanced their power in the workplace. In addition, internal democracy has blossomed and commitment to the union has deepened.

However, this success has come at a considerable cost and, as we have argued elsewhere (Fletcher and Hurd 1998), there are significant limitations to this strategy. Implementation of the "organizing model" is likely to be very staff-intensive, at least at the beginning. It is critical that union leaders not act under the illusion that by adopting approaches that focus on member activism this, in and of itself, will free staff time for external organizing or other priorities. It does not necessarily work out that way. To a great extent these locals are challenging long-standing cultures and practices. Given the nature of the political and economic climate in which we live, change will rarely be spontaneous, thus continual attention from staff representatives will be required in order to achieve the desired mobilization.

We do not take issue with the necessity of member mobilizations, greater internal democracy, or the need for workers to be organized in order to fight for the issues that they consider critical. However, we conclude that mobilization will not—on its own—result in a greater impulse among members to support *external organizing* nor will it contribute directly to external organizing itself. The approaches followed by "organizing model" locals do, in many cases, help them reallocate resources, but that reallocation does not necessarily involve assigning priority to external organizing. Such a prioritization must be a political choice by the leadership of the local. Winning member enthusiasm for external organizing is distinct from the challenges of internal mobilization.

Building Support for Transformation

The most important ingredient of local union transformation is buy-in from members and staff. Without cultivation of political will as part of the

process, backsliding is almost inevitable. Since most members have never known any style of unionism other than the "servicing model" or insurance agent approach, the natural tendency is to view change skeptically and to accept retrenchment passively. Because staff typically are more experienced with traditional servicing than with either organizing or alternative forms of representation, their comfort level and competencies are also more in tune with a union that acts like an insurance agency. In short, the servicing magnet is exceedingly powerful because it is easier for almost everyone to think of representation the old way. As Kotter warns, "Until changes sink deeply into a [union's] culture, a process that can take five to ten years, new approaches are fragile and subject to regression" (Kotter 1995, 66).

Transformation has more staying power when there is wide acceptance of a new vision. To achieve this, persistence and a comprehensive program are key. In particular, Kotter warns against "under communicating the vision by a factor of ten" (Kotter 1995, 63). Some leaders of best-practices locals encountered resistance when they moved quickly to shift priorities and resources toward external organizing without first winning members' support. Other local leaders misinterpreted activism by a militant minority as an endorsement for change, when in reality most members and staff retained commitment to traditional approaches and rebelled when they realized what was happening. We conclude that external organizing can be established as an ongoing priority only with a clear and consistent message plus vigilant attention to building political will.

There are several layers to local union transformation. For one thing, locals must balance the necessities of external organizing with the necessity to respond to internal pressures for continued representation. In other words, streamlining representational practices needs to be done in such a way that members are convinced that they are not being abandoned on the altar of external organizing. It is counterproductive to fantasize about members' militance, commitment to progressive change, and competence to accept increased responsibilities. Hardheaded assessment and carefully crafted strategic plans are absolute necessities.

This is why we have devoted attention to grievance and arbitration practices with the potential to save resources. The efforts reflected in these innovations signify an intent to accomplish representation, but to do the work in a different way. The locals cited here have been attempting to build greater ownership of the union by the members and to break the members from the sense that the union, as an institution, is an insurance agency or law firm.

Additionally, building support for transformation must be founded on a clear *leadership consensus*. In the absence of a unified leadership vision as to the

objectives of transformation, the steps to be taken and the risks involved, the potential for splits and factionalism are great. Unity of will is especially important, because transformation means new responsibilities for union staff and activists. Inevitably a whole new set of expectations arise for staff representatives, including a different role in the grievance procedure, expectations to organize internally and stimulate member activism, and the reassignment of staff to external organizing. Likewise, new expectations are placed on union activists, including greater responsibility for work-site-based struggles, for grievance handling, and for new member recruitment and orientation. In addition, selected activists are likely to be encouraged to participate in external organizing and to take a more visible role in the larger community.

The one issue that haunts this entire matter is whether any of this new work, best practices, and so forth, can actually help to *recreate* a labor movement in the United States. We certainly have no answer to this, but we would say that should organized labor fail to experiment with new forms of representation with the intent of reallocating resources toward external organizing, then the obvious conclusion is that the union movement, as we have known it, will cease to exist by the early part of the twenty-first century.

Building support for transformation must be recognized as integrally connected to member education. Transformation is not a matter of altering a few practices but really goes to the ideological foundation of U.S. trade unionism. To succeed, it requires education, discussion, and struggle around questions of local union structure, representational responsibilities, the organizing imperative, and alternate visions for the future. New efforts by the AFL-CIO to promote economics education for union members illustrates the recognition by the federation's new leadership that a more global approach to education must be adopted if successful mobilizations and member ownership of unions are to materialize. As with the AFL-CIO, so it is also true with local unions. To transform the practice of local unions, the members must be convinced that such changes are necessary and urgent, and they must be given the opportunity to acquire the leadership and representational skills required. To paraphrase Machiavelli, revolutions that come only from the top have a tendency to be swept quickly away for lack of a firm foundation.

NOTES

1. Portions of this essay are extracted from the final report prepared for the SEIU on the "Best Practices" project. However, the introduction and conclusion and analytical comments throughout are those of the authors and do not represent the opinions of SEIU.

2. For a more comprehensive discussion of this topic, see Fletcher and Hurd 1998.
3. After the election of Andy Stern as president of SEIU in April 1996, Woodruff moved to the international staff as director of local union organizing.

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